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## English Locative and Temporal Prepositions Used by Indonesian Learners

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**Abstract:** *This paper attempts to describe and explain the errors made by Indonesian students in using English preposition of place and time. By doing so, it is expected that teacher can be more aware of some aspects that they should pay more attention to. This analysis will not only seek for the errors made by the learners, but it will also elaborate the factors triggering the errors, in the basis of underlying principles of linguistics. In addition, further analyses might enable the more understanding on the different locative and temporal concepts between English and Indonesian speakers. To achieve that remarkable elaboration, this study will combine error analysis and contrastive analysis in examining the phenomena of the use of English temporal and locative prepositions.*

**Keywords:** *error analysis; contrastive analysis; locative; temporal; preposition.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

As English is more widely used, Indonesian people starts learning and using English. Formal schools design curriculum for English language and private institutions offer courses on English language mastery. Although it is still a foreign language in Indonesia, its high prestige is unavoidable. One who speaks English is regarded as more intelligent and assumed coming from upper class society.

Having many students learning English, it is interesting then to see them learning this language in which it is rather different from their L1, the local language, and L2, Indonesian language (however, Indonesian language starts to place the position of local language as L1). The differences obviously cause some obstacles in learning English; be it in the pronunciation, phrase structure, or grammatical aspect. English is a Germanic language belongs to Indo-European language family (Clackson, 2007), while Indonesian (and most languages in Indonesia) belongs to Malay-Polynesian language under the branch of Austronesian language family (Campbell and Poser, 2008). Thus, because English is a totally different language from Indonesian, the grammatical aspect of both languages are also distinctive. The obstacles found by learners in lerning English trigger the emergence of studies on comparing English and Indonesian grammatical elements (Munir, 2004; Safiruddin, 2009; Zulianti, 2012; Rahmawan, 2013).

The difficulties in learning English can also be seen from the use of prepositions among learners in Indonesian. Prepositions *at*, *on*, and *in* that can be used to express spatial and temporal relation might trigger the confusion of the learners. Along with the growth of English learners in Indonesia, studies on the comparison of preposition of English and Indonesian is increasing. Those studies concerned on contrastive analysis (Karunia, 2008; Gaffari, 2012) and translation of Indonesian prepositions into English (Akrom, 2013). Due to the discrete system possessed by English and Indonesian, thus, the errors made by learners related to the use of locative and temporal prepositions inevitably occur. There is a gap in which needs to fill by a comprehensive study focusing on the errors made by Indonesian learners in producing prepositions and the comparison of the system of prepositions in English and Indonesian to figure out the underlying principles of the differences.

Regarding this prominent topic, this paper then aims at explaining the errors made by English department student of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan in producing English locative and temporal prepositions and seeking for the explanation by contrasting English and Indonesian language. However, it will focus on preposition *at*, *in*, and *on* as three main prepositions in English. This study is expected to be able to provide comprehensive, or at least preliminary, explanation to the phenomena.

## 2. ERROR ANALYSIS AND CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

Error Analysis (EA) refers to the subsequent attempts to rectify what was seen as an overly theoretical approach to language learning. Error analysis works to predict errors by comparing the linguistic systems of the mother tongue and target language (Richards, 1973: 5). Thus, when talking about error analysis, it must be related to second language learning (Corder in Richards, 1973: 158), involving the interference of the L1 or source language (SL) to the L2 as the target language (TL).

Error analysis is important subfield that bridge linguistic theory and language teaching. Nowadays it becomes an important focus in the field. Studies of error analysis have been conducted by some experts talking about the nature of errors (Touchie, 1986), how to correct the errors (Martínez, 2006; Iseni, 2011) and the significance of learners' errors (Corder in Richards, 1973; Corder, 1982). The description of learners' errors obtained by conducting error analysis can provide the evidence of the system of the language that one is using at a particular point in the course (Corder in Richards, 1973: 25). For the teacher, it might give information on the progress of learning and what remains for the learner to learn. For the researcher of language, it can provide the proof of how language is acquired or learned. Moreover, the significance can be felt for the learners themselves as they will realize the systems of the language and their own strength and drawbacks in learning new language (Corder in Richards, 1973: 25).

To support the result of EA, the description to the language system of the languages under study is actually needed. It is then the role of contrastive analysis. Contrastive analysis can be defined as the subdiscipline of linguistics explaining the similarities and differences of two (or more) languages (Fisiak, 1981: 1). It's different from comparative (historical) linguistics of which it studies two or more different but related languages in order to reconstruct a proto-language (Fisiak, 1981: 1). Thus, in contrastive analysis, the languages being compared are unrelated and the main point of the analysis is not to figure out the language ancestor, rather it describes the discrete systems among them.

Setyowati (2013: 142) stated that EA and CA can be applied to complete each other strengths and weaknesses. She stated that this combination can be useful for innovative language teaching. Thus language teaching will not be based only on empirical facts, but also on theoretical reasonings. In line with Setyowati's statement, this study will use both error analysis and contrastive analysis in identifying and overcoming problems found in language learning. It will contribute to language teaching and learning by providing the teachers with another insight in developing the materials or focusing particular methods in teaching.

## 3. METHODS

This is a descriptive qualitative study. It is categorized as qualitative research as it meets the criteria of a qualitative research as followings: (i) the data of the study are words, (ii) it answers to "what", "how", and "why" questions, and (iii) the researcher is the key instrument (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2014). The data of this study are English clauses or sentences containing prepositional phrase. The data of this study were taken from students of composition (writing 3) course. The students' writings were gathered randomly by conducting purposive sampling. The data were collected by observing students' writing and no interaction needed. Meanwhile, the data of Indonesian clauses or sentences containing prepositional phrases were gathered by using introspective method as the researcher is the native speaker of Indonesian language. To analyze the data, this research is conducted by using *metode padan*, in this case is translational method because it compares two different languages (1992). Due to the design as a qualitative study, it will not count the frequency of occurrence of the errors made by the learners.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. The Learners' Errors in Using Locative and Temporal Preposition

As part of learning, errors are inevitably produced by the learners. In choosing the correct preposition we can also observe errors made by English learners. This section will discuss the findings of incorrect use of prepositions *at*, *on*, and *in* found in students' writings.

#### *Errors in Preposition at*

After examining students' writing, there are some errors concerning the use of preposition *at*, as locative and temporal preposition. Sentence (1)–(4) show the errors of using preposition *at* as location marker.

- (1) The boys play football *at the front yard*.
- (2) They meet the woman *at the garden*.
- (3) I live *at the equator line*.
- (4) My father read letters from my sister *at the train*.

Meanwhile, sentence (5)—(7) below depict the incorrect use of preposition *at* as preposition of time.

- (5) I have breakfast *at morning*.
- (6) I finish teaching private course *at evening*.
- (7) My family and I visited Jakarta *at 2010*.

#### *Errors in Preposition in*

Although commonly found in English, many learners still make some errors in using *in* as preposition of place as in the following examples (sentence [8]—[10]).

- (8) They can see their favorite artists *in TV*.
- (9) There are many pictures hanging *in the wall*.
- (10) My favorite activity at home is finding information *in Internet*.

In addition, the errors related to preposition *in* can be found as well in its use as preposition of time as in sentence (11)—(15) below.

- (11) My friend will come to Jogja *in Friday*.
- (12) *In weekend*, I just stayed in my boarding house.
- (13) I wore new clothes and new shoes *in Idul Fitri*.
- (14) My younger sister was born *in October 10, 1998*.
- (15) I always study *in the night*.

#### *Errors in Preposition on*

In expressing location using preposition *on*, there are some errors found in students' writings. Sentence (15) and (16) show the errors made by the learners.

- (15) He watched a woman *on little house*.
- (16) They were laughing and gossiping *on my car*.

Not only errors in showing location, the errors of using preposition *on* are found in its use as temporal preposition as in sentence (18)—(20).

- (18) I was born *on 1995*.
- (19) The building of campus 2 is not too crowded *on afternoon*.
- (20) We went to Dieng Plateau *on April* last year.

### **4.2. The Tendencies of Errors Made by the Learners**

Observing errors, there are some tendencies which can be depicted. Those tendencies include:

(i) The students cannot distinguish the dimension of the place sensitively. They use *at* to refer to non-building place and to specific time during a day (except night) as in *at the front yard* and *at the garden*. In addition, they use *in* for a surface. In English, *wall* and *earth* belong to entities having surface. Besides, Internet and TV are also categorized as surface since they are displayed on screen. But, learners seem to perceive differently and use *in* instead of *on* before *wall*, *earth*, *Internet* and *TV* as in *in internet*, *in the wall*, *in TV*, and *in earth*. However, some of them tend to use preposition *in* correctly when expressing place. It is plausible because the learners assume *in* as the equivalence of *di* as in *in the room*, *in the kitchen*, and *in the garage*.

(ii) Students find difficulties to talk about specific time during the day or week or special festival using correct preposition as in prepositional phrases *at morning*, *in Idul Fitri*, and *on afternoon*. However, most of them can use preposition of time *at* to refer to exact time correctly.

(21) The class will start *at* 9 *a.m.*

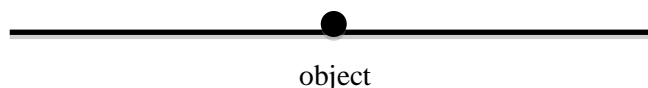
(22) I will meet my grandpa today *at* 7 *p.m.*

#### 4.3. Why the Errors Occur

After identifying errors made by learners, it is better to analyze what is the theoretical reasons causing the errors to occur. Apart from the psychological possibilities, this study focuses on the language system between English and Indonesian. In Indonesian, to state precise position or time, language users might choose between *di* and *pada*, equivalence with *at*, *on*, and *in* in English. Typologically, both English and Indonesian are prepositional languages which mean they have the same distribution for the adpositional element: preposition – noun (Prep-N). This prepositional distribution is alike due to the word order of English and Indonesia. Languages with SVO word order tend to have adposition before the noun in the adpositional phrase (Comrie, 1989). Unlike the structure, English and Indonesian prepositions are different in some extent. This fact make the errors possible.

(i) English and Indonesian language have different spatial relation concept

Even though classified as SVO language with preposition (different from Japanese, for instance, with its SOV word order), English and Indonesian differ in the semantic aspect of the preposition. Before going on to the semantic aspect, let's take a look at the illustration of the concept of exact position.



English and Indonesian have the prepositions to state precise location. Nevertheless, they differ in the term of sensitivity. According to Quirk et al. (1985, 673—674), there are four types of dimensions related to prepositions of place; they are:

(a) Dimension 0: My car is *at the cottage*.

The cottage is assumed as a single precise place (a building as a single entity).

(b) Dimension 1: Our cottage is *on that road*.

The road is assumed as a line.

(c) Dimension 2: I hang the picture *on the wall*.

The wall is assumed to have surface.

(d) Dimension 3: I put the vegetables *in the refrigerator*.

The refrigerator is assumed as 3-dimension entity.

Whereas Indonesian does not possess the sensitivity related to spatial concept. To make it more specific, it is assisted by the addition of *dalam*, *luar*, *atas*, as in *di dalam*, *di luar*, *di atas*, and so forth. English is said to have cognitive framework in perceiving space in this world. This fact exhibits that Indonesian people do not put their concern on space. Due to its unimportance, thus they do not have specific lexicons to label the concept. This is in line with Crowley who stated that if there is no particular concept exist in a particular society or culture, the language will not have the name for it (Crowley, 1992: 23).

For surface, English will use *on*, while Indonesian language has no specific preposition and use the same preposition (*di*) as in showing position in a 3-dimension place.

(23) *Para siswa dapat mencari sumber informasi di internet.*

(24) *Ayah menggantung piagam penghargaanannya di dinding.*

Moreover, because of the sensitivity itself, using different preposition *at*, *on*, and *in* might result in different interpretation of the spatial relation. For instance, if one says *in a river*, it will be different from *on a river*. The difference does not only cover the spatial interpretation (*in* or *on*), but also to the relative concept of the place itself as in *in the school* and *at school*. The former will refer to the school as a building (3-dimension entity) and the latter is the institution.

Unlike English, Indonesian only has *di* to refer to spatial concept in a proposition so there will be no different interpretation.

(25) *Mereka belajar di sekolah.*

(26) *Anak-anak berenang di sungai.*

Based on the discussion, it is not uncommon to find many incorrect uses of prepositions among English learners.

(ii) English and Indonesian language have different temporal relation concept

As a space sensitive language, basically English is also sensitive to temporal concept. According to Quirk et al. (1985), preposition *at*, *on*, and *in* express different range of time concept in English language. Preposition *in* shows longer time related to year or month, while for shorter time as week or day, preposition *on* is chosen. In addition, to mark shorter time than a day (hour), English has preposition *at*. However, referring to festivals, English speakers will use preposition *at* as in *at Christmas*, but they will use *on Christmas' eve* when talking about specific period of the festival (Bourke, 2003).

Furthermore, the sensitivity of preposition of time in English can be seen from the different interpretation resulting from different use of preposition as in *at night* and *in the night*. According to Bourke (2003), the former is used when talking about night as a general time while the latter is used to talk about a particular time of the night.

In Indonesian, there is no rule of using preposition of time. Both *di* and *pada* can be used to mention year, month, and day. In Indonesia, there is no semantic difference between two equivalent prepositions. In expressing location, preposition *di* is mainly used, while in stating time, preposition *pada* is frequently used.

(27) *Kita akan menghadiri rapat pada pukul 08.00.*

(28) *Resepsi pernikahan akan dilangsungkan pada pukul 09.00 WIB.*

(29) *Kami menikah pada tahun 2015.*

(30) *Pada bulan Oktober, saya berulangtahun.*

(iii) There are three prepositions in English to express exact position or time. Meanwhile, there are merely two prepositions to state exact position or time in Indonesian. Lapoliwa (1992) mentioned that in showing precise position and time in Indonesian, there are *di* and *pada*. Meanwhile, in English, based on Quirk et al. (1985), there are *at*, *on*, and *in* in talking about spatial and temporal relation. The differences in number of prepositions in SL and TL expressing the same concept are able to prompt various incorrect use in the TL.

(iv) As language is used in different regions, the emergence of variations of a language is unavoidable. English, as one of living languages, also has many regional varieties. Two biggest varieties of English are known as *British English* (BE) and *American English* (AE). These variations are confusing the learners due to some discrete pronunciations, lexicons, and grammatical aspect, including the use of preposition. In AE, preposition *on* used before weekend is acceptable, although Standard English grammar books teach us to use *at* before weekend (Bourke, 2003). Teachers lacking the knowledge of language variations might identify this as an error, while indeed it is not.

#### 4.4. What Should Language Teachers Do?

Looking at the discussion, English teachers play crucial role in determining the success path of the learning. By knowing the errors and the theoretical reasons, teachers are able to map the progress of the learning as well as designing the next materials to improve the drawbacks. Therefore, learning English will not only about following the curriculum, but also paying attention to the needs of the learners. Teachers can design the syllabus and create the media needed for the betterment of the learning progress. Furthermore, after knowing the drawbacks, teachers might need to focus on some aspects found as the weaker parts in understanding the language system.

Practically, teachers can design worksheet on English locative and temporal prepositions focusing on some weaknesses indicated by the errors made by the learners. Besides, teachers can introduce to the learners the differences of English and Indonesian spatial and temporal relation concept so that learners have good understanding on cross-linguistic concept: all languages have their own characteristics, their own ways of thinkings. It is impossible to write in English by thinking in

Indonesian. In addition, in prepositional phrase, the relation between the preposition and the place or time is important in English. Different choice of preposition can trigger different meanings. This is called as collocation. Having this knowledge, teachers have to focus on collocation drilling when teaching preposition phrase. Hence, the learners will get used to and can get the language sense of the native speaker of English.

## 5. CONCLUSION

According to the results, it is observed that English and Indonesian have discrete concepts on spatial and temporal relation expressed in locative and temporal prepositions. Regarding these distinguished systems, thus, it is best for language teachers to adapt the materials in teaching prepositions so that the learners' errors triggered by interference of the L1 of the learners can be minimized or even omitted. Rather, this study is a mere preliminary study that needs to be revised by the next research using wider context of data sampling and sharper analysis.

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